

# Farmers Market Program



## Background

Direct marketing of farm products through farmers markets has become an increasingly important sales outlet for agricultural producers nationwide, mostly due to growing interest among consumers in understanding where their food comes from. The number of farmers markets in the United States has grown dramatically in recent years, increasing from 1,755 in 1994 to 5,274 known facilities nationwide by mid-2009.

## Who Benefits From Farmers Markets?

**Small/medium-sized farm operators.** Direct access to consumers at farmers markets provides an important supplemental source of farm income for many growers. According to USDA's latest National Farmers Market Survey, more than 25 percent of vendors at surveyed markets in 2005 derived their sole source of farm income from farmers markets.

**Consumers.** Farmers markets allow consumers to have access to locally produced, farm-fresh food and the opportunity to personally interact with the individuals that produced the food.

**The community.** Farmers markets provide easier access to food in many urban communities where the availability of fresh, nutritious food is scarce. 59 percent of farmers market managers surveyed in 2005 indicated that their market accepted WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers, amounting to \$17,696 in annual revenue per market site, while 44 percent reported that their market accepted Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers, amounting to \$15,654 in annual revenue per market.

## How Does USDA Support Farmers Markets?

**Information clearinghouse.** AMS's Marketing Services Division (MSD) conducts research on emerging trends in farmers market operations and practices, and prepares research reports, reference material and fact sheets for distribution to farm vendors, farm market managers, and other interested members of the general public. To disseminate this information to a wide audience, MSD hosts an Internet web page on farmers market activities, located at [www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets](http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets), which contains links to all of our pertinent publications. For those individuals without regular Internet access, MSD also maintains a "Farmers Market Hotline" at 1-800-384-8704, where we receive questions from the public about farmers markets resources.

**Outreach.** MSD staff frequently participate in and provide support to industry, producers and academic conferences and training sessions throughout the country, where they present research findings and share information on marketing strategies and resources with agricultural producers, Extension economists, State agency personnel, and other parties interested in supporting direct farm marketing ventures.



**Organizational support.** AMS helped create and continues to provide support to the national Farmers Market Coalition (FMC), which serves as a national information network for the farmers market sector and provides a centralized mechanism for developing, expanding, and supporting farmers markets. The website for FMC, an independent non-profit organization, is <http://www.farmersmarketcoalition.org>.

AMS also spearheaded the creation of a “Farmers Market Consortium” to facilitate the exchange of information about farmers market programs and available assistance within and outside government circles. Current members of the Consortium include several USDA agencies, the Office of Refugee Resettlement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and several non-profit organizations, such as the Project for Public Spaces, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Winrock International’s Wallace Center for Agricultural and Environmental Policy. As part of the Consortium’s activities, AMS released the Farmers Market Resource Guide, which provides a one-stop information source about farmers markets programs and options for assistance, and the proceedings report from the recent National Farmers Market Summit, a symposium organized by the Consortium that involved 75 key stakeholders from the farmers market industry. Both documents may be viewed at [www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarketconsortium](http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarketconsortium).

**Farmers market operations.** MSD continues to coordinate planning and operation of seasonal farmers markets at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, and works with the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Carver Office Building in Beltsville, MD, and the Bannister Federal Complex in Kansas City, MO to help support their farmers markets.

**Technical assistance in market facility development.** MSD staff analyze the feasibility of planned renovation or construction of projects at several types of food market facilities, including farmers markets. They also develop conceptual designs of facilities, estimating costs and assessing expected levels of market patronage, and prepare detailed demographic profiles of local communities using Claritas market research data. Such research is typically carried out on a collaborative basis with the State government, local government or non-profit agency closely associated with the market being studied.

**Farmers Market Promotion Program.** In FY 2006, MSD received funding to administer the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), a grant program designed to facilitate and promote farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer market channels for agricultural products. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis following comprehensive review. In FY 2008, more than \$3 million in grants were awarded to eligible entities, and this funding is expected to reach \$5 million in FY 2009. Additional information about FMPP is available at [www.ams.usda.gov/FMPP](http://www.ams.usda.gov/FMPP).

